



**Testimony of Deborah Chernoff**

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Before the Aging Committee

*IN SUPPORT: HB 6893, An Act Increasing the Personal Needs Allowance for Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities*

*CONCERNING: SB 1003, An Act Concerning Nursing Home Care and HB 6894, An Act Concerning a Study of Long Term Care*

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Good morning, Senator Flexer, Representative Serra and members of the Aging Committee.

For the record, I am Deborah Chernoff, Public Policy Director for District 1199, representing 25,000 health caregivers in Connecticut, including about 8,000 nurses, nursing assistants and support staff who work in nursing homes. I am testifying today in support of HB 6893, *AA Increasing the Personal Needs Allowance for Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities* and offering some comment of two other bills, SB 1003 and HB 6894, which call for studies of long-term care needs.

**HB 6893: Dignity and Independence for Nursing Home Residents**

This bill would raise the Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) from \$60 to \$65 per month.

As caregivers, nursing home workers are devoted to supporting the dignity and independence of residents who may have lost everything else – their homes, their families and their health. The Personal Needs Allowance gives nursing home residents the opportunity to purchase just a few small items they may want to feel like “themselves.” The PNA was cut in 2011 from \$69 to \$60; the administration’s current budget proposal would cut it even further. That would generate only a small savings to the state – but would greatly diminish the quality of life for nursing home residents.

Even with the current PNA of \$60, the Human Services Committee has heard testimony from a number of our members about going out to purchase, on their limited wages, a favorite brand of soap or lotion for a resident, or some other item that will make the facility feel like more of a home – because the resident may have exhausted their personal funds paying for haircut or a preferred snack.

That happens every day now—before this proposed cut. Just read nursing home resident Brian Capshaw’s eloquent op-ed in the February 25 edition of the Connecticut Mirror (online at <http://ctmirror.org/2015/02/25/op-ed-nursing-home-residents-clipped-again-by-malloys-budget-proposal>) if you want to really understand what it will be like for the residents to have this small measure of dignity and independence clipped.

While I am supporting this bill today on behalf of our members, because we believe it is the right and the compassionate public policy for our state, I am also testifying on the basis of my personal

experience, as the daughter of a 92-year-old mother. This past summer, my mother broke her hip, requiring a month-long stay for rehabilitation in a nursing home. My mother put up uncomplaining with the loss of independence, the difficult roommate, the less-than-appetizing food and the pain of physical therapy. What she couldn't put up with was the bad coffee. So every morning, I stopped at Starbucks in Woodbridge for an early cappuccino before heading to Hartford. It was a small thing and a small expense but it made a huge difference to her attitude and her sense of self.

Little things mean a lot to all of us, but especially when our world has been narrowed and our abilities limited. Not every nursing home resident has a family member with the means and the time to purchase that small thing that makes a big difference. I can only imagine what it means to the longer-term residents of nursing homes, who aren't going anywhere, for whom the facility is their home, to have to give up even more of their already-limited choices.

As daughters and sons, citizens and caregivers, we add our voices to those of Connecticut's nursing home residents in supporting a modest increase in the Personal Needs Allowance.

### **SB 1003 and HB 6894: Something's Missing**

Both of these bills would establish studies of needs within the spectrum of long-term care services, with 1003 seeking a study of nursing home care and services and 6894 examining needs for home and community based services.

These studies are potentially useful in planning and developing long-term care services. Both also omit any mention of or attention to a vital element: sustaining and developing the workforce to deliver those services.

Every demographic and workforce needs projection concludes that we will need a huge number of skilled, compassionate and well-trained caregivers to provide services across all settings. No matter what these proposed studies might find about current and future needs, we will not be able to deliver services without caregivers.

Our suggestion is that these studies expand to include data on key workforce issues. How many workers in long-term care in Connecticut make less than \$15 an hour? How many want full-time hours, but are unable to get them and must cobble together a 40 hour week by working at two or three different facilities or for multiple home-care consumers? Our own research efforts indicate that more than half of certified nursing assistants and support staff still earn less than \$15 an hour, even after an average of ten years of experience. The statistics for home care providers are even lower.

To end high-turnover and create the stable workforce we all know we need to meet the needs of the "gray tsunami" these are the kinds of questions we need first to answer, and then to address. Please consider this in the nature of a friendly amendment to make the proposed studies more meaningful for developing an effective strategy and long-term care plan.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify on behalf of our caregiver members.